

Tiracchana-Katha Unskilful Talk

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Tiracchana-Katha unskilful talk occurs in The *Pali Canon* in the *Sutta Pitaka* and the *Vinaya Pitaka*.

Dictionaries

Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera in his *Buddhist Dictionary* defines *Tiracchana-Katha* as

“‘Low Talk’ literally ‘Beastly Talk’, is the name in the *Sutta*-texts for the following.

Talk about kings and robbers, ministers and armies, danger and war, eating and drinking, clothes and dwellings, garlands and scents, relations, chariots, villages and markets, towns and districts, women and heroes, street talks, talks by the well, talk about those departed in days gone by, tittle-tattle, talks about world and about sea, about gain and loss’...In the commentaries 4 further kinds are enumerated, thus bringing the number to 32... namely: talk about sensuous enjoyment, self-mortification, eternity and self-annihilation.”

The Pali Text Society’s *Pali-English Dictionary* defines *Tiracchana-Katha* as “animal talk,” or “wrong or childish talk in general”.

The *Tiracchana-Katha* are listed as Appendix 1 of Venerable Ledi Sayadaw’s *Magganga-Dipani: The Manual of The Constituents of the Noble Path* (page 57)

Thirty-two kinds of talk obstructing fruition and rebirth in higher planes.

- 1) *Rajakatha* - Talk about kings
- 2) *Corakatha* - Talk about robbers
- 3) *Mahamatta katha* - Talk about ministers of state
- 4) *Senakatha* - Talk about armies
- 5) *Bhayakatha* - Talk about dangers
- 6) *Yuddhakatha* - Talk about battles
- 7) *Annakatha* - Talk about food
- 8) *Panakatha* - Talk about drinks
- 9) *Vatthakatha* - Talk about clothing
- 10) *Sayanakatha* - Talk about dwellings
- 11) *Malakatha* - Talk about garlands
- 12) *Gandhakatha* - Talk about perfumes
- 13) *Natikatha* - Talk about relations
- 14) *Yanakatha* - Talk about vehicles
- 15) *Gamakatha* - Talk about villages
- 16) *Nigamakatha* -Talk about market towns
- 17) *Nagarakatha* - Talk about towns
- 18) *Janapadakatha* - Talk about districts
- 19) *Itthikatha* - Talk about women/men
- 20) *Surakatha* - Talk about heroes
- 21) *Visakhakatha* - Talk about streets

- 22) *Kumbhatthanakatha* - Talk about watering places
- 23) *Pubbapeta-katha* - Talk about relatives who have passed away
- 24) *Nanattakatha* - Tittle-tattle
- 25) *Lokakkhayika katha* - talk about the origin of the world
- 26) *Samuddakkhayikakatha* - Talk about the origin of the ocean
- 27) *Itibhavabhava katha* - Talk about Eternity belief
- 28) *Itibhavabhava katha* - Talk about annihilation belief
- 29) *Itibhavabhava katha* - Talk about worldly gain
- 30) *Itibhavabhava katha* - Talk about worldly loss
- 31) *Itibhavabhava katha* - Talk about self-indulgence
- 32) *Itibhavabhava katha* - Talk about self-mortification

These 32 kinds of talk obstruct fruition and rebirth in higher planes. Consequently, these topics of conversation are inappropriate for *Bhikkhus* (Buddhist Monks).

This list is also in Venerable Ledi Sayadaw's *Manuals of Buddhism* Note 1 (pages 409-410) and *Manuals of Dhamma* Appendix 1 (page 220).

Anguttara-Nikaya

The Book of the Gradual Sayings or More Numbered Suttas (Anguttara-Nikaya)
Volume 5 *The Book of the Tens* includes two *Suttas* on this topic: *Sutta* 69 Topics of Talk and *Sutta* 93 View.

Sutta 69 Topics of Talk explains that a number of monks were indulging in aimless talk. The Buddha asks them "Pray, monks, on what subjects were you conversing gathered together here, and what was the nature of the talk left unfinished by you?" The monks explained that they were engaging in pointless talk. (pages 86-87)

The Buddha explains "Monks it is not seemly that ye clansmen who in faith have gone forth from the home to the homeless should indulge in such talk. There are these ten topics of talk...Talk about wanting little, about contentment, seclusion, solitude, energetic striving, virtue, concentration, insight, release, release by knowing and seeing. These, monks, are the ten topics of talk." (page 87)

F. L. Woodward explains in a footnote that *Tiracchana-Katha* is

"Talk not conducive to heaven, release and the Way"; generally translated "animal-talk" (not of course about animals). "childish talk"; but I think the emphasis is on the idea of close to the ground ... as opposed to the upright human posture or, as in Sanskrit, "oblique, awry". (page 87)

Digha Nikaya

The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views: The Brahmajala Sutta and its Commentaries

Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Bhikkhu Bodhi translates 1.17 of The *Brahmajala Sutta* as

1.17 Whereas some ascetics and Brahmins, while living on the food offered by the faithful, engage in frivolous chatter, such as about kings, thieves, and ministers of state; talk about armies, dangers, and wars; talk about food, drink, garments and lodgings; talk about garlands and scents, talk about

relations, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, and countries; talk about women and talk about heroes; street talk and talk by the well; talk about those departed in days gone by; rambling chit-chat; speculations about the world and about the sea, talk about gain and loss - the recluse Gotama abstains from such frivolous chatter. (page 37)

His note to this verse explains:

Tiracchana-Katha often rendered 'animal talk'; however, the commentary explains it as 'talk, which because it does not lead to emancipation, runs horizontal to the (upward leading) paths to heaven and liberation' (*aniyyanikatta saggamokkhamagganam tiracchanabhuta katha*). An animal, *tirracchana-gata* is so-called because it moves horizontally with the earth, in contrast to man, who walks erect. But talk which moves horizontally is pointless or frivolous talk, not animal talk. Besides which, animals cannot speak. (page 37)

The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya

Translated by Maurice Walshe

Maurice Walshe translates *Tiracchana-Katha* as unedifying conversation. His Note 33 to *Sutta 1 Brahmajala Sutta* explains

Tiracchana-Katha literally 'animal-talk'. As animals walk parallel to the earth, so this kind of talk does not lead upward. (page 538)

He translates three *Suttas* which include *Tiracchana-Katha*.

Sutta 1 Brahmajala Sutta: The Supreme Net: What the Teaching is Not

1.17 Whereas some ascetics and Brahmins remain addicted to unedifying conversation as about kings, robbers, ministers, armies, dangers, wars, food, drink, clothes, beds, garlands, perfumes, relatives, carriages, villages, towns, and cities, countries, women, heroes, street- and well gossip, talk of the departed, desultory chat, speculations about land and sea [philosophical speculations of a materialist kind], talk about being and non-being [and profit and loss], the ascetic Gotama [Buddha] refrains from such conversation. (pages 70-71)

Sutta 9 The Potapada Sutta: About Potthapada States of Consciousness

3. There Pottapada was sitting with his crowd of wanderers, all shouting and making a great commotion, indulging in various kinds of unedifying conversation such as about kings, robbers, ministers, armies, dangers, wars, food, drink, clothes, beds, garlands, perfumes, relatives, carriages, villages, towns, and cities, countries, women, heroes, street- and well gossip, talk of the departed, desultory chat, speculations about land and sea [philosophical speculations of a materialist kind], talk about being and non-being [and profit and loss]. (page 159)

Sutta 25 Udumbarika-Sihanada Sutta: The Great Lion's Roar to the Udumbarikans

2. And just then Nigrodha was sitting in the midst of a large crowd of wanderers who were all shouting and screaming and making a great clamour,

and indulging in various kinds of unedifying conversation about kings, robbers, ministers, armies, dangers, wars, food, drink, clothes, beds, garlands, perfumes, relatives, carriages, villages, towns, and cities, countries, women, heroes, street- and well gossip, talk of the departed, desultory chat, speculations about land and sea [philosophical speculations of a materialist kind], talk about being and non-being [and profit and loss]. (page 385)

Dialogues of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya

Translated by T. W. and Caroline Rhys Davids

In their footnote to *Sutta 25 Udumbarika-Sihanada Sutta*: The Great Lion's Roar to the Udumbarikans T. W. and Caroline Rhys Davids explain:

Tiracchana-Katha, literally animal-talk, ... Brutish, brutal, beastly would all be literal, but very bad renderings... The phrase animal-talk is ... untranslatable. Buddhagosa ... says, not leading to heaven or emancipation. (pages 33-34)

Majjhima Nikaya

Bhikkhu Bodhi explains in Note 748 in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*.

Many translators render this expression as animal talk. However, *Tiracchana* means literally 'going horizontally,' and though this term is used as a designation for animals, *Papancasudani* [*Commentary on the Majjhima Nikaya*] explains that in the present context it means talk that goes 'horizontally' or 'perpendicularly' to the path leading to heaven and liberation." (page 1279)

In *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*., Bhikkhu Bodhi translates five *Suttas* which include *Tiracchana-Katha*.

Sutta 76 Sandaka Sutta To Sandaka

Now on that occasion the wanderer Sandaka was seated with a large assembly of wanderers who were making an uproar, loudly and noisily talking many kinds of pointless talk, such as talk of kings ... (page 618)

Similar descriptions of *Tiracchana* are given in *Sutta 77 Mahasakuladaya Sutta*: The Greater Discourse to Sakuludayin verse 4, *Sutta 78 Samammandika Sutta*: *Samanamandikaputta* verse 3, *Sutta 79 Culasakuludaya Sutta*: The Shorter Discourse to Sakuludayin verses 3-4, and *Sutta 122 Mahasunnata Sutta*: The Greater Discourse on Voidness verse 12.

Samyutta-Nikaya

In *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* Chapter XII 56 *Saccasamyutta* *Connected Discourses on the Truths* 10 (10) Pointless Talk is translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi as:

Bhikkhus, do not engage in the various kinds of pointless talk, that is about kings, thieves, and ministers of state; talk about armies, dangers, and wars; talk about food, drink, garments and beds; talk about garlands and scents; talk about relations, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, and countries; talk about

women and talk about heroes; street talk and talk by the well; talk about those departed in days gone by; rambling chitchat; speculation about the world and about the sea, talk about becoming this or that. For what reason? Because, *Bhikkhus*, this talk is unbeneficial, irrelevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and does not lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

When you talk, *Bhikkhus*, you should talk about: 'This is suffering'; you should talk about: 'This is the origin of suffering'; you should talk about: 'This is the cessation of suffering'; you should talk about: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering'. For what reason? Because, *Bhikkhus*, this talk is beneficial, relevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and leads to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. Therefore *Bhikkhus*, an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is suffering.' ... an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is the way to the cessation of suffering.' (page 1843)

In Note 379 to this *Sutta*, Bhikkhu Bodhi explains

Tirracchana is literally 'animal talk', but *Saratthappakasini Samyutta Nikaya atthakatha* [Commentary on the Samyutta Nikaya] explains it as talk that 'runs horizontal' (*Tirracchanabhutam*) to the paths leading to heaven and liberation. (page 1962)

Vinaya-Pitaka The Book of the Discipline

*Pacittiya*s which contain material found in the *Suttas* are ... No. LXXXV, whose stock enumeration of the various kinds of "low", "worldly", "childish" or intellectually inferior talk, *tirracchanakatha*, occurs at several places in the *Suttas*. (*The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka)* Volume III (*Suttavibhanga*) page xv)

The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka) Volume II (*Suttavibhanga*) Expiation (*Pacittiya*) XXI discusses Bhikkhus who give nuns an inferior talk of *Tiracchana-Katha* worldly talk. (pages 263-265)

The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka) Volume III (*Suttavibhanga*) Expiation (*Pacittiya*) LXXXV starts

...at Savatthi in the Jeta Grove in Anathapindika's monastery. Now at that time the group of six monks having entered a village at the wrong time, having sat down in a hall, talked a variety of worldly talk, that is to say talk of kings, talk of thieves, talk of great ministers ... People looked down upon, criticised, spread it about saying: "How can these recluses, sons of the Sakyans, having entered a village at the wrong time, having sat down in a hall, talk a variety of worldly talk, that is to say, talk of kings...? It is like householders who enjoy pleasures of the senses. (pages 82-83)

The Buddha rebukes them

How can you, foolish men, having entered a village at the wrong time ... talk a variety of worldly talk, that is to say ... talk of becoming and not becoming thus or thus? (page 83)

I. B. Horner's footnotes explain

Tiracchana-Katha literally animal talk, that is worldly, low, childish talk, gossip... There is a tendency at *Sumangalavilasini* [Commentary on the *Digha Nikaya*] to couple *gehasitakatha*, talk of worldly life, with *Tiracchana-Katha*. (page 82)

The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka) Volume IV (*Mahavagga*) V includes a story of six monks engaging in *Tiracchana-Katha* worldly talk and being rebuked by the Buddha. (pages 250-251)

Visudhimagga The Path of Purification/Purity

Visudhimagga explains that *Tiracchana-Katha* is an obstacle to meditation.

The BPS Buddhist Publication Society translation of *Visudhimagga The Path of Purification* states

Twenty-six kinds of 'aimless (literally, animal) talk are given in the *Suttas*... which the commentary increases to thirty two....38. 3. speech: that included in the thirty-two kinds of aimless talk is unsuitable for it leads to the disappearance of the sign." (page 133) This is the counterpart sign which arises together with access concentration in meditation.

The PTS Pali Text Society translation of *Visudhimagga The Path of Purity* translates this as

And that talk which is called among the thirty-two kinds of worldly talk is unsuitable, as leading to the disappearance of the sign. (page 148)

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